

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

16 July 1951

SUBJECT: NIE-34: SPAIN'S POTENTIALITIES IN WESTERN DEFENSE  
(Draft for Board Consideration)

THE PROBLEM

To estimate, in the light of the US decision to associate Spain with the Western defense effort, the contributions which Spain could make to US security and the defense of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, as well as to examine the military, political and economic problems involved in associating Spain with the Western defense effort.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The geographic location and terrain features of Spain make it potentially valuable to the Western defense effort in the event of a Soviet attack on Europe. The Iberian peninsula might provide (a) a base of operations against Soviet forces and the USSR, (b) a position protecting lines of communication to the Mediterranean, and (c) a redoubt in case the rest of Western Europe should be overrun by Soviet forces.

SECRET

2. We believe that it will be feasible to procure long-term rights to develop and use a few convenient air and naval bases in Spanish territory, in return for economic and military aid from the US.

3. Extensive use of Spain as a base area for US operations, or any attempt to secure from Spain a substantial contribution in men and materials to the Western defense effort, would call for large-scale US economic and military assistance. The Spanish railroad and highway system is inadequate to meet the requirements of a major base area. The Spanish armed forces are neither equipped nor trained to contend with a major enemy. The Spanish economy at present is not in condition to permit any additional outlay for defense. These deficiencies could be remedied with US help.

4. We believe that a program of purely military aid to Spain is not feasible, and that aid to the civilian economy must be a part of any program to include Spain in the European defense effort.

5. The nature of Franco's government, however, creates peculiar obstacles to any considerable US effort at economic and military assistance. We believe that the Spanish regime is stable and, although it is corrupt and administratively

SECRET

SECRET

inefficient, a program of economic recovery and development can be carried out. Military aid would probably be used by the Spanish government with greater efficiency than economic assistance.

6. The major allies of the US will certainly protest strongly even against a US-Spanish agreement on base rights, and they would view with extreme disfavor any extensive program of economic and military aid to France. Though distaste for Franco in some European countries may slowly diminish, we believe that Spanish membership in NATO is out of the question for a long time to come.

6.7. We believe that Spanish membership in NATO at present is out of the question. A US-Spanish agreement on base rights and still more any extensive program of US economic and military aid to Spain will undoubtedly meet with popular and even official disfavor in most NATO countries. We do not believe that such opposition will be so fundamental in character as to undermine the loyalty of these countries to NATO.

SECRET

SECRET

## DISCUSSION

1. By far the most important asset of Spain, from the point of view of Western defense, is its strategic location. Control of the Iberian Peninsula, or denial of its facilities to the USSR, is of obvious importance to Western defense. The Peninsula dominates the western entrance to the Mediterranean, flanks the Atlantic approaches to Western Europe, and lies on the normal air routes connecting Western Europe with South America and Africa. Its rugged terrain offers strong defensive capabilities. Bases could be developed in Spain which would be a very effective supplement to those in North Africa and the UK. The Pyrenees along the northern land frontier provide a natural defense line. Either the entire peninsula, or some coastal portion of it, could become a defensible redoubt or beachhead if the remainder of Europe were overrun by Soviet forces. Development during peacetime of facilities, bases, and communications in the peninsula would greatly facilitate its use in war.

2. At the present time, airfields at Madrid and Valencia are capable of supporting sustained heavy bomber, medium bomber, and jet light bomber operations. Four other fields can support limited heavy and medium bomber operations. Four seaplane

CONFIDENTIAL  
SECRET

SECRET

bases, now in operation, three of them outside Spain proper, are strategically located for anti-submarine operations. Spain has three principal naval bases, each capable at present of giving limited logistical support to Western fleets. (For more detail concerning bases, see Appendix A.) Spain has a sizeable, largely unskilled labor force which is virtually untouched by Communist sympathy or influence and could be effectively employed at the bases. Some local materials, especially concrete, might be available for immediate use.

3. The Spanish Army consists of 335,000 men organized into 18 divisions. It is now neither trained nor equipped to contend against a major enemy, but these deficiencies could be remedied with adequate US assistance. Franco has said that if his army were in proper condition he would be willing to send a substantial force abroad to fight against the USSR, and ten divisions could perhaps be spared for this purpose from the requirements of keeping order within Spain. The equipping and training of these divisions would take time. More important, the political arrangements with other Western powers which would be necessary before they could be employed in French or German territory would be difficult to effect, except in face of actual or obviously impending hostilities. The Spanish Army could certainly be depended upon to defend the Pyrenees line

- 5 -

SECRET

SECRET

against foreign invaders. It is at present capable of doing so against a major enemy only for a few weeks, but its capabilities in this respect could be increased. Spain could mobilize an army of probably a million and a half, but the country is quite incapable of supporting such a large force without extensive outside aid.

4. The combat effectiveness of the Spanish Air Force is negligible against a major enemy; it would have to be almost entirely reconstituted before it could be of much use in Western defense. The Spanish Navy, though very small and lacking modern equipment, is well-balanced, its personnel is well-trained, and it could certainly be useful in patrol duties if given a reasonable amount of modern equipment and trained in its use.

5. Spain has a few raw materials of great value: tungsten ore, mercury, and strontium. It produces a good quality of iron ore and has the largest known deposits of iron pyrites. The exportable surpluses of all these materials are presently available to the Western powers, but production of most of them could be substantially increased. Spain produces about 85 percent of its domestic coal requirements (it has no coking coal) and has large deposits of potash. Copper, lead and tin are also found, but the production of these metals is not at present sufficient

SECRET

SECRET

to meet domestic requirements. The Spanish textile industry, if assured raw materials and new equipment, is of sufficient importance to make some contribution to the Western defense effort. Spanish plants can manufacture some of the less complicated items of military equipment.

6. Although in some respects discussed below the Franco government constitutes an obstacle to the utilization of Spanish potentialities in the Western defense effort, in other respects it is an asset. No government in Europe is more profoundly anti-Communist than that of Spain. Probably no other Western European government is as likely to give full weight to military considerations in the anti-Communist struggle or to be less hampered by ideological and political controversies. No Western country is habituated to spending a larger share of its national budget upon the armed forces.

7. We believe, moreover, that the Franco regime is stable and is likely to remain so, especially if it receives US aid. There is little doubt, however, that there is widespread dislike of the government, that economic conditions have driven a large segment of the population to the point of despair, and that the recent strike wave was a real expression of the temper of those people. It is equally true that the Spanish people profoundly

CONFIDENTIAL

SECRET

fear another civil war, that they are disarmed, that the opposition is rarely able to act in concert, and that Franco continues to receive the support he needs from the Army, the Church, the Falange, and the industrial interests. A relatively small amount of US economic assistance would alleviate some of the popular misery which is currently the most important cause of unrest. Military aid, even in small amounts, would confirm the support of the Army for the regime.

SECRET

SECRET

PROBLEMS IN REALIZING THE SPANISH POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION

8. Spain is a poor country, with a run-down economy and an antiquated social system. Recovery from the destruction of the Civil War was retarded first by World War II, then by the political and economic isolation to which Spain was subsequently subjected. Spain enjoyed none of the advantages of US economic aid which hastened the recovery of other Western European countries. The dictatorship was unable to conquer these difficulties. It survived, but it could not stimulate a vigorous national revival. It still exists in a state of social and economic emergency. The consequence is that until the economy is revived with US assistance, no appreciable additional share of the Spanish national product can be diverted to purposes of defense, whether directly in appropriations for the armed forces, or indirectly in measures for the improvement of the economy.

9. From the point of view of Western Defense, the main physical difficulty in realizing a Spanish contribution to the common effort is probably to be found in the condition of the Spanish transportation system. (See Appendix "B") The railroads of Spain are unquestionably the worst in Western Europe; the highways are totally inadequate for modern military traffic.

SECRET

SECRET

Important US bases could not depend, as for example they largely can in Britain, upon the already existing roads and railways. It would appear that even for defense of the Pyrenees a considerable reconstruction of lines of communication would be essential. The Spanish government, from its own resources, is quite unable to carry out any adequate program to rehabilitate transportation facilities. Such improvements, and any others to mines or factories from which increased production is desired, would require substantial US aid.

10. In the administration of a program of US economic aid to Spain, difficulties may be caused by the inefficiency of the Franco regime. Mismanagement and waste are to be expected, and are apt to be more marked than in other western European countries, especially so long as Franco refuses the services of many capable Spanish administrators. Furthermore, the Franco regime will undoubtedly render close US supervision of any aid program difficult, and will try to keep US influence within Spain at a minimum. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, we believe that an economic aid program could be successfully carried out, and that a considerable improvement of the Spanish economic situation can be brought about without disproportionate cost to the US.

- 10 -

CONFIDENTIAL  
SECRET

SECRET

11. It will probably not be difficult to procure from the Spanish government long-term rights of developing and using a few convenient bases and base sites. General Franco has already signified his willingness to bear a part in the anti-Communist effort and to engage in "defensive" military conversations with US representatives. He will of course make the best bargain he can. He requires and will expect to receive substantial economic aid and military equipment, but he also seeks the increased stability and prestige which US assistance will give his regime.

12. The majority of the voting public, at least in the northern NATO countries, is still opposed to any alliance or close connection with Spain, and is suspicious of US moves to give economic or military assistance to the Spanish dictator. In part this attitude arises from the almost pathological distaste for the Franco regime which still inspires certain important sections of the populations of Western Europe. It is reinforced, however, by two other opinions of a different nature: (1) that any US aid given to Spain is subtracted from the aid available for NATO powers; and (2) that in building up Spain the US is demonstrating an intention to abandon the rest of Europe to Soviet invasion, and to fix a defense line at the Pyrenees. No politician

SECRET

SECRET

in a NATO country can risk the accusation that he stands for a policy designed to abandon his country to the invader. Hence, even those who are aware of the true value of Spain in a strategic sense find it difficult publicly to defend their views.

13. At present neither the British nor probably the French governments will allow even a US-Spanish base agreement to pass without protest. For the reasons suggested above, moreover, public and governmental protest in the NATO countries (except Portugal) would doubtless increase proportionally to an increase of US commitments or grants to Spain. We believe that Spain's admission to NATO is at present out of the question. We do not believe, however, that opposition in the NATO countries to a closer defense connection between the US and Spain is so fundamental as to constitute any threat whatever to the structure of NATO, or to the loyalty of its present members.

SECRET

SECRET

APPENDIX "A"

SPANISH MILITARY SITUATION

1. The Spanish Army. The Spanish Army consists of 335,000 men organized into 8 army corps, 18 divisions (12 infantry, 4 mountain infantry, 1 cavalry, and 1 so-called armored), 5 Special Mixed Coastal Groups (equivalent to 1 division and 4 brigades), 6 cavalry brigades, and 63 independent regiments. The table of organization of the Spanish infantry division is roughly half that of the United States infantry division. Spanish units at the present time are under strength.

Spain's physically fit manpower (ages 15-49) is approximately five million men, and of this number about two million have had military training or combat experience.

The training of Spanish army officers is relatively good, but the effectiveness and efficiency of the training received by the average Spanish soldier is poor to fair. This low estimate of troop training is attributed to: (1) excessive losses of training time through furloughs and frequent holidays; (2) insufficient funds to provide ammunition, fuel, modern weapons and equipment for all

SECRET

SECRET

phases of training; and (3) illiteracy--ten to twenty percent of the men inducted are illiterate, and another fifteen to twenty percent are nearly so.

The over-all morale of the Spanish Army is regarded as satisfactory and personnel are generally physically fit.

The majority of Spanish weapons are obsolete or obsolescent, but many are usable and could be effective in the hands of well-trained troops. The Army is deficient in heavy artillery, effective antitank and antiaircraft weapons. Severe shortages also exist in most types of signal and engineer equipment as well as automotive transport, tanks, and other combat vehicles. The lack of ammunition in stock and production potential, however, is much more serious than the weapons situation. It is estimated that the ammunition supply for full mobilization of 40 divisions for various categories of weapons is adequate for from 3 to 12 days of combat.

2. The Spanish Air Force. The Spanish Air Force has a personnel of approximately 36,000, about 750 of whom are considered to be qualified pilots. The Air Force is organized into 9 fighter, 11 bomber, 3 reconnaissance, 6 assault (attack)

- 14 -

SECRET

SECRET

and 3 amphibious squadrons. The equipment consists of a variety of German, Italian, and Spanish aircraft in varying stages of obsolescence. The principal fighter types are the CR-32 Italian and the ME-109 German-made aircraft. The bomber type principally used is the He-111 German (Heinkel).

The combat value of the Spanish Air Force is practically nil against a major foe. Any improvement in efficiency would necessitate extensive foreign aid in every category, and would entail complete rebuilding of the Air Force.

3. The Spanish Navy. In effective or potentially effective ships, Spain currently has: 1 CA, 3 CL, 1 CLAA, 15 DD, 3 SS, 9 PG, 6 CM and 9 AM, besides a limited number of coastal warfare type craft. By contrast to most other western continental European navies, this force is fairly well balanced and homogeneous for its size. The relatively high average age of its vessels is partly off-set by good maintenance and the fact that the task force type of operational requirements -- as understood in the USN, are not contemplated.

Basic training and theoretical appreciation of the elements of modern naval warfare are of a high order. By 1935-39 standards, combat readiness and effectiveness are good. Eye witnesses of recent large scale exercises testify to the high order of seamanship and ship handling displayed by all participating vessels.

- 15 -

SECRET

SECRET

Principal deficiencies revolve around the lack of modern weapons and equipment, which seriously restricts training development and the accumulation of operational experience with modern methods and techniques. The absence of a naval air arm is another handicap which no amount of theoretical study or simulation in exercised can overcome.

4. Spanish Air Bases. The air facility system of Spain, the Balearic Islands, and the Canary Islands comprises 53 airfields and 8 seaplane stations. Spain possesses two significant complexes of airfields: one at Madrid in central Spain, with four airfields, including a repair depot; and the other at Cartagena on the southeastern coast, with five airfields.

Two airfields, Madrid/Barajas and Valencia/Manises, are capable of supporting sustained heavy bomber, medium bomber and jet light bomber operations. Four other airfields are capable of supporting limited heavy bomber and medium bomber operations: Barcelona/Muntadas, Cartagena/San Javier, Salamanca/Matacan, and Seville/San Pablo. The airfields at Barcelona and Seville have the advantage that they can be supplied by water transportation.

The two best general locations for air operations in Spain are the Ebro River Valley in the North, and the Guadalquivir River Valley in the South. Each of these general locations is

- 16 -

SECRET

SECRET

served by road and rail facilities. The Guadalquivir Valley has the additional advantage of having a navigable river as far inland as the capital city of Seville. Tankers and transports could navigate to this point, entering the river directly from the Atlantic Ocean.

Also important to the West are four strategically located Spanish seaplane bases, three of which are situated in the Western Mediterranean and one which is in the Canary Islands. The most important installation is located at Pollensa Bay in the Balearic Islands. Second is the base of San Javier in the Mar Menor near Cartagena. The third Mediterranean base is located on the Spanish Moroccan coast in the Presidio of Melilla. By use of these bases, long-range ASW seaplanes, properly equipped electromechanically, could effectively patrol the western end of the Mediterranean and its Atlantic approaches against hostile submarines.

The airport and seaplane base at Gando in the Canary Islands could be effectively used for ASW work in the eastern Atlantic between the coast of Africa and the Azores. No development outside of maintenance machinery would be necessary to place it in immediate use.

5. Spanish Naval Bases. Spain's three major naval bases are located at El Ferrol (north coast), Cartagena (Mediterranean coast),

- 17 -

SECRET

SECRET

and Cadiz (Atlantic coast). Shipyards and good base facilities are located at these three points. Smaller shipyards are located at most of the major Spanish ports and are capable of good basic ship construction and repair. Present facilities are not used to capacity, and are barely able to maintain the present Spanish Navy and merchant fleet because of critical shortages of materials and deficiencies in equipment. Expansion programs have been drawn up for all the naval bases and most of the larger ports, but are being carried out very slowly due to the depressed condition of the Spanish economy.

Extensive underground storage facilities (including oil) exist at each of the major naval bases and at some other coastal points. More are in the process of construction, but work is proceeding very slowly.

Because of their geographical position, Spain's three major bases, if expanded and improved, could furnish important logistical aid to Western fleets controlling the Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic in time of war.

In the event that existing Spanish bases are found to be inadequate for Western Fleets, new bases could be constructed. Despite her long coastline, however, Spain has few good natural ports, and careful selection would be required. Most existing

- 18 -

SECRET

SECRET

ports are artificial and were developed more as appendages to existing seaboard cities than because of their natural excellence. Some natural harbors exist, e.g., La Coruna, Vigo, etc., and one or more of the excellent artificial harbors could undoubtedly be used.

- 19 -

SECRET

SECRET

## APPENDIX "B"

## SPANISH TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

1. Railroads. The railroads of the Iberian Peninsula are unquestionably the worst in Western Europe. The railroads of Spain are in exceptionally bad shape, steady deterioration having taken place since 1930. The basic rail nets of both Spain and Portugal have 5 foot 6 inch gauge as compared with the 4 foot 8½ inch gauge in the US and France. A number of narrow-gauge lines are of local importance in both Spain and Portugal.

The broad-gauge Spanish railroad system centers on Madrid and connects all the main cities with the capital.

However, no line is double-tracked for the entire distance from Madrid to any seaport. Sections of rail routes have been electrified, partly because of the shortage of good coal.

Railroad construction in Spain is difficult because of the rugged terrain. The numerous tunnels, sharp curves, frequent steep gradients, poor roadbeds, and old and inadequately maintained rolling stock make fast train operations impossible. Signals are inadequate, the supply of all kinds of equipment is insufficient, freight cars are in most cases without brakes,

- 20 -

SECRET

SECRET

hotboxes are common, and ties are old and rotten. As a result, accidents are numerous. Bridges are in such poor condition that trains must often slow down to a crawl. The system cannot handle present peacetime traffic adequately, and freight is constantly backlogged. On 1 January 1950, there were approximately 10 percent fewer steam locomotives and freight cars and 50 percent fewer passenger cars than in 1935 in service in the State-owned railroad system. In 1948, it was estimated that 35 percent of the locomotives in operation were 45 years old or older. Spain needs to import finished railway equipment specially designed to fit the broad-gauge, steel for domestic railway equipment production, ties, and coal.

The railroads of Spain are highly vulnerable to air attack and sabotage because of the many tunnels and bridges and the lack of alternative routes. Defense of the Pyrenees would be a serious problem from the point of view of the present railroad capabilities. In 1947 the withdrawal of 60,000 Spanish troops from the Pyrenees required 3 months' time and to a large extent disrupted normal railway traffic. The difference in gauge between the French and Spanish railroads necessitates transfer of goods at the border.

- 21 -

SECRET

SECRET

2. Highways. The highways of Spain are almost totally adequate for modern military traffic. The Spanish highway system radiates from Madrid, and good connecting roads in outlying areas are few. The deficiency is particularly important in the Pyrenees, where the Spanish roads are poor. On the French side of the border the network of roads is much better.

Among the obstacles encountered in Spain are weak or narrow bridges, narrow streets through towns, overhanging balconies, sharp curves, steep grades, switchbacks, tunnels, and a lack of alternative routes. Road construction is at a standstill, and maintenance of existing roads is inadequate. Furthermore, Spain lacks the means to buy asphalt and road-building machinery.

There is also a shortage of motor vehicles, tires, parts, and gasoline. The majority of vehicles in use are over 10 years old, and both passengers and freight move primarily by railroad.

- 22 -

SECRET